

771 The first observers described the Pahouin, especially the Fang,
 781 as "less superstitious," "less given to fetishism" than neighboring
 114 populations. Trilles and Martrou emphasized their profound religious
 sentiment, while Allégret (no. 147) gives very interesting information
 about the feeling of religious destitution they experienced, particularly
 after contact with Europeans. Often observed also has been the ease
 with which they would adopt new beliefs and ceremonies, and this refers
 not only to Christian sects but to cults like bwiti and ngôl
 and even, before the last war, to freemasonry in the vicinity of
 Libreville.

All these influences are so intermingled that we must resort to a
 kind of conjectural palaeontology in order to reconstruct their original
 beliefs. Without casting any reflection upon the intellectual integrity
 of observers like Trilles and Martrou, we must recognize—and regret
 —that a certain professional slant from time to time affected their
 conclusions, to a point that induces us to turn instead to laymen much
 less well qualified linguistically, like Largeau, of whom Trilles has
 shown himself perhaps a little too critical.

a. Concept of God, Creation

776 The Pahouin believe (or used to believe, see later on) in a creator
 god Mebe'e (Fang, Mebere, Mebeghe), eternal, formerly immanent,
 becoming infinitely transcendent after the first nsem.

The word Mebe'e seems to be related to the verb be'e, to carry,
 which has the agent-noun, mbe'e. Mbe'e is a plural form, correspond-
 ing to nouns of action and also to the collective plural forms of names
 of liquids (mendim = water, metyi = blood, meyôm = sperm, etc.).
 It is usually accompanied by triple apposition: "Mebe'e, Mebe'e
menkpwa, sokuma, mbongbwe" (or, according to Trezenem, mba
angwe). The meaning of these three qualifiers is as uncertain as that
 of Mebe'e; menkpwa should probably be connected with kpwaé = to
 strike down, to judge, to condemn; sokuma with kôm (kum) = to
 arrange, to direct, sô conveying the idea of generosity, rectitude,
 balance (Boulou, soso, zoso); mbongbwe would then, according to
 Grebert, mean "creator of generations" (bo = to make; ngbwé =
 maternal kinship), but could also be /108/ connected with ngbwa =
 love, friendship, alliance, with the sense of "he who makes an
 alliance" or "he who loves."